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ABSTRACT

This brief examines the impact of teaching on student achievement, necessary steps for ensuring teacher quality, and policies needed to support that effort. Research has identified the strong connection between student achievement and teacher preparation and skills. Efforts to generate consistently high teaching levels across all classrooms must begin with an articulated, widely accepted teacher preparation and support system that covers the entire spectrum of a teaching career. Research indicates that it is less harmful to students, and more cost effective, to recruit teacher candidates who meet ability and disposition requirements than to counsel out ineffective preservice or practicing teachers. Effective teacher preparation programs must include coherent, aligned coursework that is tied to practice and extensive, rigorous clinical classroom experiences. A state's credentialing process must be aligned with accepted teaching standards and designed to encourage ongoing professional development. Beginning teachers need on-the-job support. Practicing teachers must continuously update their skills and knowledge. Key policies that can contribute to improved classroom teaching include: align teaching standards to student content standards; train veteran teachers to mentor new teachers; ensure time for effective professional development; and rethink teacher compensation. Sidebars highlight how some colleges have promoted teacher development and quality. (SM)

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POLICY BRIEF

November 2000

ensuring teacher quality

a Continuum *of* teacher Preparation *and* Development

That student achievement and good teaching are connected is intuitive. But just how important is high-quality teaching, and what do we know about how to get it? This brief examines the impact of teaching on student achievement, the necessary steps for ensuring a quality teaching force, and policies needed to support that effort.

The Effects of Good Teaching on Students

Over the past decade, several compelling studies have identified the strong connection between student achievement and teacher preparation and skills. One key study, looking at 900 Texas schools, found that teacher expertise – measured by the possession of a master's degree, scores on a licensing examination, and years of experience – accounted for 43% of the difference in students' math and reading achievement across grades one through eleven. So powerful were the effects of teacher expertise that the achievement gap between white and black students was almost entirely attributable to differences in the qualifications of their teachers.[1] Research also indicates that dollars invested in teaching quality net larger student achievement gains than the same dollars invested in any other type of school resources. Such findings underscore the importance of all students having highly qualified and skilled teachers and point to the effectiveness of investing in strategies that better ensure teaching quality.

What We Know about Developing Good Teachers

Efforts to generate a consistently high level of teaching across all classrooms must begin with the creation of an articulated and widely accepted teacher preparation and support system – one that covers the entire spectrum of a teaching career, from recruitment to retirement. Serving as its foundation must be agreed-upon standards for what teachers should know and be able to do if they are to equitably and effectively serve all students. All aspects of the development continuum – including acceptance criteria and curriculum in teacher preparation programs, licensing requirements, induction support and ongoing professional growth opportunities – must align with the standards and complement each other. While significant work has been done in the development and dissemination of teaching standards, careful articulation and alignment of teacher preparation and development efforts remain a challenge.

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Recruitment

Some colleges and universities have initiated efforts to attract more undergraduates into teaching by establishing teaching scholarships, actively marketing teacher education classes and programs within the undergraduate community, and, in some instances, establishing an education major and minor for the first time. Some graduate schools of education have also changed how they consider applicants. Grades and test results are still used in the selection process, but these schools have added interviews to help them better identify students with desirable personal characteristics (e.g., dispositions, commitment). A looming teacher shortage has served as impetus for some programs to also actively recruit people in other professions who might consider a career change, especially those who have deep content knowledge in math or science. Such practices coincide with research showing it is less harmful to students, and also more cost effective, to recruit candidates who meet ability and disposition requirements than to counsel out ineffective preservice or practicing teachers.

Center X at University of California, Los Angeles, aggressively recruits candidates who share the goal of making a difference in the academic lives of students who live in poverty. In this way, Center X creates cohorts of future teachers who share a mission of turning around under-performing urban schools in the Los Angeles area. The program has found that these teachers also remain in the profession in greater numbers than do other teachers entering the profession.

Preparation

Effective recruitment must be partnered with effective preparation. Yet many teacher preparation programs are characterized by courses that fail to connect theory to practice, by superficial and unaligned content-area training, and by limited time for teacher candidates to be in a classroom. By contrast, research indicates that the most effective preparation includes coherent and aligned coursework (in both pedagogy and content) that is tied to practice, as well as extensive and rigorous clinical classroom experiences. (As the profile of teacher candidates expands to include more mid-career professionals from other fields, preparation programs may need to be modified to accommodate those who already have deep content knowledge.) Equally important, the curriculum of teaching programs should be based on accepted teaching standards.

Alverno College, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, designed its teacher preparation program around a curriculum that makes explicit the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that successful teachers must demonstrate. At the undergraduate level, the education curriculum is based on eight general abilities, (e.g., analysis, problem solving). In the graduate program, the curriculum addresses five additional education-related abilities (e.g., diagnosis of students' learning needs).

Credentialing

A state's credentialing, licensing, or certification processes must be aligned with accepted teaching standards and designed to encourage teachers' ongoing professional development. At the national level, the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) has developed and implemented standards for teacher licensing based on the teacher preparation standards identified by Alverno College. In recent years, a growing number of states have begun offering alternative credentialing programs aimed at alleviating teacher shortages. One emerging type of alternative program is designed to fast-track all would-be teachers, who tend to be young and recently out of college and have limited, if any, content-specific or pedagogical training. Another type of alternative program targets mid-career workers from other professions who already possess deep knowledge in specific hard-to-staff content areas, such as math or science, but who lack teaching know-how. While it is clearly important to provide credentialing flexibility, it remains critical that such efforts be aligned with state academic and teaching standards.

Over the past 15 years, Connecticut has taken significant steps toward a coherent career-long teacher development system. In addition to aligning teacher education and credentialing requirements (with each other and with student content standards), the state requires that all new classroom teachers participate in a two-year induction program. During this period, the new teachers operate on the equivalent of a "beginner's permit," and at the end of the two years, they must submit and be evaluated on a teaching portfolio. Successful evaluation earns them a *provisional license*, which can be converted to a professional certificate after they have completed an additional 30 credit hours of coursework.[2]

Induction

The best teacher preparation program can only go so far in readying candidates for the classroom. If new teachers are to become effective and remain in the profession, they need on-the-job support: collegial, pedagogical, and reflective. Optimal induction efforts entail the involvement of carefully selected and prepared mentor teachers, a substantial period of support (typically two years), reflective activities embedded in the novice teacher's daily work, and opportunities to meet with experienced teachers and/or other novices to examine and learn from student work.[3] Mentoring is considered the most cost-effective strategy for further developing and retaining newcomers to the profession. Research indicates that compared to teachers receiving no collegial support, mentored novices are more effective in their early years of teaching, tend to focus on student learning sooner, and leave teaching at a lower rate.[4]

The Santa Cruz New Teacher Project in California[5] includes two years of mentoring by selected veteran teachers. A mentor meets with a new teacher approximately two hours a week to examine classroom practice and identify areas of strength and growth. The mentors receive specific training in mentoring, including peer observation, and they are released fulltime from their classroom work. Beginning teachers receive release days for observing other teachers, curriculum planning, reflection, and self-assessment.

Ongoing Professional Development

Like all professionals, teachers need to update their skills and knowledge continuously. Yet, traditional professional development opportunities have tended to be isolated, one-shot experiences, disconnected from each other and only remotely related to the subjects, activities, and challenges of teachers' real work. Needed, instead, are in-depth learning experiences that are ongoing, reflective, and aligned with student standards and assessment. It is also important to give teachers adequate time for professional development. One promising effort to combine the elements of ideal professional development is the work of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, which has developed standards and assessments for accomplished teaching in key content areas and grade levels. Teachers seeking National Board Certification develop a portfolio of their practice as reflected in student work, a process requiring teachers to consider and assess their practice against clearly stated teaching standards and, in some cases, modify their practice accordingly.

(continued on next page)

Connecticut is committed to giving all teachers ongoing opportunities for skill and capacity development. Among other things, teachers may attend summer institutes focused on comprehensive themes related to specific instructional philosophies that are tied to state reform goals, such as the new state assessment and the alignment of curriculum and instruction to the state's standards. During the 1994–95 school year, the focus was the state standards.[6] Additionally, veteran teachers will soon be required to participate in more in-depth professional development through the use of portfolios, coursework, and field experiences.

RESOURCES

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Ferguson, P., & Womack, S. T. (1993). The impact of subject matter and education coursework on teaching performance. *Journal of Teacher Education, 44,* 1. 55–63.

Stansbury, K., & Zimmerman, J. (2000). *Lifelines to the classroom: Designing support for beginning teachers.* San Francisco: WestEd.

Policies for Improving Teacher Quality

In considering policies for ensuring teaching quality, it is essential to see teacher growth as a career-long continuum – from recruitment to retirement. Any policy aimed at one segment of the continuum is likely to have ramifications for other segments and should be considered accordingly. With that in mind, key policies that will contribute to improved classroom teaching include:

- *Align teaching standards to student content standards, and then align all preparation and professional development efforts to the teaching standards.* This ensures that teachers will be ready to teach the more rigorous material students are expected to learn.
- *Train and support veteran teachers to serve as mentors for new teachers during their first two years of teaching.* Effective mentoring is a key component in helping newcomers move from theory to practice. For mentors, themselves, the experience can motivate, strengthen skills, and, in some districts, lead to career advancement.
- *Ensure adequate time for teachers to participate in effective professional growth experiences.* Reconsider the traditional school year and/or teaching schedule to build in more learning time for teachers.
- *Establish scholarship and debt-forgiveness programs as incentives for students to enter the teaching profession.* This type of financial support is especially important given the low starting salaries for most teachers.
- *Rethink teacher compensation.* While research indicates that salary is not a significant factor in people's decision to enter the teaching profession, more competitive compensation could serve as a means to attract additional teacher candidates, especially in areas with a high cost of living.

ENDNOTES

[1] Ferguson, R. (1991). Paying for public education: New evidence on how and why money matters. *Harvard Journal of Legislation*, 28, pp. 465-498.

[2] By 2003, this requirement will have to be met with graduate level coursework.

[3] The New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz, found that after seven years, 90% of teachers who participated in its induction program are still teaching, 94% remain in education, and 72% have assumed two or more leadership roles in their schools. This contrasts sharply with the 33% attrition rate for teachers nationwide within the first five years of teaching. St. John, L., & Strong, M. (2000). *Summary of long-term development of teachers after induction*. Santa Cruz, CA: University of California, Santa Cruz, New Teacher Center.

[4] National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996). *What matters most: Teaching for America's future*. New York: Teachers College Press; Little, J. W. (1990). The mentor phenomenon and the social organization of teaching. In C. Cazden (Ed.) *Review of Research in Education*, 16, pp. 297–351. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

[5] The Santa Cruz New Teacher Project is part of the New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

[6] Massé, D., Kirst, M., & Hoppe, M. (1997). *Persistence and change: Standards-based reform in nine states*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Consortium for Policy Research in Education.

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